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THE FUTURE OF RELIGION

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON'S

REPLY TO

MR. BERNARD SHAW.

(Reprinted for the Heretics.)

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THE FUTURE OF RELIGION.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton's Reply to Mr. Bernard Shaw.

From "The Academy," June 3rd, 1911.

A DETESTABLE OUTRAGE.

The question whether Mr. Shaw has beliefs or none may interest an egregious egotist . . . our protest is against the dissemination of poisonous theories amongst young persons . . . but we do not observe that the lecturer was kicked out of the window, or that he was thrown into the Cam . . . unless public attention is called to the vile and blasphemous ravings . . . it is unnecessary to resort to coarse profanity to teach the doctrines of materialism. . . . Socialism must now stand forth naked and unashamed as resting for its sanction on flagrant infidelity.

From the "Fortnightly Review," July, 1911.

. . . When every schoolgirl lisps her contempt of the "Early Victorian" era and of the "Philistines," who are in a sudden and strange minority; when a crowd of undergraduates assembles to hear Mr. Shaw proclaim that no man who looks upon Christ as the highest ideal is worth working with; when an utterance which is at least an unwarrantable assault upon some of the loftiest and noblest spirits of our times and something of an insult to the most

sacred of our dead, is made within the time-honoured walls of Cambridge University for the edification doubtless of some of the sons of those who simply and straightforwardly hold a high faith; when . . . it is surely time for a chivalrous revolt against this conventional unconventionality.

From "The Guardian," November 10th, 1911.

The Heretics have arranged for a public meeting in the Guildhall next Friday, when Mr. G. K. Chesterton will speak on "Orthodoxy," in reply to Mr. Bernard Shaw's recent address on "The Future of Religion." The local Press last week gave a full report [since published by the Heretics] of a speech delivered to the same Society by Mr. Cornford, Fellow of Trinity: it was a very outspoken criticism of the Christian religion and its position in the University. Such facts may perhaps be occasionally chronicled in these columns, so that an impression may be formed of the very various influences brought to bear upon the modern undergraduate. Nothing, for instance, could be further removed from the fare provided by the Heretics than the evangelistic addresses which are being given nightly during this week by Dr. Torrey. One is inclined to think that the C.I.C.C.U. would have done well to secure someone in greater sympathy with modern religious thought and scholarship. Some surprise has been expressed that the Master of Pembroke should have taken the chair at the opening address on Sunday night. . . ."

*From the "Cambridge Daily News,"
November 18th, 1911.*

G.K.C. ON G.B.S.

The large room at the Guildhall was well filled on Friday night, when, at the invitation of the enterprising University Society known as "The Heretics," Mr. G. K. Chesterton replied to Mr. Bernard Shaw's lecture on "The Future of Religion," delivered before the same Society in the Victoria Assembly Rooms last Term. Mr. Chesterton arrived about a quarter of an hour late, but made ample amends for this in an address of close upon an hour's duration,

and by answering a host of questions and arguments from all parts of the room. Altogether, he was speaking for nearly two hours. He had a most enthusiastic reception on entering the room, and was loudly cheered both at the beginning and at end of his address, and also at the close of the meeting. While he was speaking he was listened to with the closest attention, and he dealt with his many hecklers in a very prompt and ready manner, replying immediately and at considerable length to every query. This latter part of the proceedings was perhaps the most enjoyable. Mr. Chesterton invited not only questions, but attack, and among those who accepted the challenge were Mr. Lowes Dickinson, Mr. Vulliamy, and other well-known members of the University. The result was an exhibition of dialectical skill such as is rarely heard at a public meeting. There was one particularly piquant incident. Mr. Chesterton had alluded to the beliefs of Charles Bradlaugh, and Bradlaugh's grandson (Secretary of "The Heretics" for this term) asked if the lecturer wished them to understand that Bradlaugh did not believe in a God. Whether Mr. Chesterton was aware of the questioner's identity or not we do not know, but he was not to be trapped by what he described as a "Greek joke"—the interpretation of the word Atheist—and he replied to the questioner's apparent satisfaction. The point seized upon by several questioners was Mr. Chesterton's assertion that religion was founded upon reason and liberty. He argued this out with his hecklers with great skill. An idea of Mr. Chesterton's religious standpoint may be gained from his expression of the belief that the claims of the Greek Church and the Anglican Church were less near the truth than those of the Roman Catholic Church.

THE CHAIRMAN.

The chair was taken by Mr. F. M. CORNFORD, who, in his opening remarks, said Mr. Chesterton was, he supposed, the only living man who had ever written two books, one entitled "Orthodoxy" and the other "Heretics." He (the speaker) had never read *Orthodoxy*," having, he supposed, been repelled by the title—(laughter)—but during the past twenty-four hours he had read "The Heretics." Mr.

Chesterton's point in the preface was that religion is a thing to be taken seriously. That, he had always supposed, was not heretical—he found now that it was orthodox. He rejoiced to find himself in agreement so far with Mr. Chesterton, whose religious views he did not accept or share, though as a wit and a man of letters he had long admired him. (Applause.) Finally, it was his duty to carry out the directions of Mr. Ogden, the President, by explaining that the Heretics were not responsible for Mr. Chesterton's opinions, any more than they were responsible for those of Mr. Shaw.

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON.

Mr. CHESTERTON, who had an ovation on rising to address the meeting, first of all explained that his late arrival was due to the fact that he came there in a Cambridge cab, and constantly encouraged the horse and driver to go slower and slower so that he might see the beauties of the town, and also begin to make up what he was going to say. (Laughter.) He had, however, no idea of being so late, and he therefore apologised to them. When he was asked to address them and select a subject there was sent to him a pamphlet representing, apparently, the remarks of Mr. Shaw. He had always an enormous personal respect and affection for Mr. Shaw, and also thought that everything he wrote was worth reading, so he read the pamphlet, with the result, broadly speaking, that he disagreed with it so entirely that, not being able to think of anything else for the moment, he wrote to say he would contradict Mr. Shaw. But it was impossible to mention that text of his remarks without also mentioning what appeared to him to be a very absurd fuss made about the lecture delivered to the Heretics by Mr. Shaw. He had seen passages in "The Academy," which appeared to him to be written not merely by an idiot—(laughter)—but by an idiot who had no belief in Christianity or any of the other things such as are sent into this world to save the afflicted and the weak, and he (Mr. Chesterton) wanted to put very strongly this point before them. He believed that a certain philosophy of the universe, and of men especially, had, as a matter of fact, been the basis of their life and his, which had been the system of Europe for very

nearly 2,000 years, which was much older than all our nations, our laws, our empires, which, if there was anything in the West which was of the stuff and substance of themselves—indeed was themselves—he happened to believe that they held the Christian religion was true.

ENGLAND A PAGAN COUNTRY.

The Christian religion had gone through a great many political vicissitudes and excitements, and there were two mistakes made about it on both sides. The mistake which he thought a great many of his friends who were Churchmen made was that they would insist on treating England as a Christian country. Now England was not a Christian country. (Applause.) A profound disbelief in all the fundamentals of the Christian religion, as, for example, that man is the image of God, was universally spread in modern times. That was why the rich oppressed the poor so abominably, and the relations between husband and wife were getting so exasperating and unnatural. England, like France, not quite so much perhaps as Russia, was a country in which the vast mass of what were called the educated classes had been separated from Christianity altogether, and of course he thought that was why we had got into the horrible mess we had. He thought it was because they were separated from Christianity, for instance, that social economists and philanthropists dared to propose a heathen idea like slavery, for certainly the ideas of forbidding strikes and the complete enrolment of workers under some State system was slavery. (Applause.) He thought it was because we had got away from Christianity and back to heathenism that people who went in for the absurd joke called Eugenics were practically willing to re-introduce the heathen idea of infanticide. He thought we were sinking back across those 1800 years and going behind the decree of Constantine, and that infanticide and slavery and all other heathen things would be the result. He thought it was true that we were in a state at the present moment in which Christianity was not the common religion of the people. We had got a state in which the commonwealth was profoundly divided upon those fundamental things. The commonwealth was divided on religion, and that was why we were so miserable.

MR. SHAW NOT BLASPHEMOUS.

Now, under conditions of that sort it was absolutely absurd (and there was not a single clear-headed theologian of the catholic tradition that he had ever heard of who would have denied that it was absurd) to impose upon such a divided state their own orthodox dogmas as matters of common manner and behaviour. If we were living in a society in which everybody worshipped the moon, worshipping the moon might be a very proper part of everyday manners, and we might accept it as we did the far less obvious action of wearing clothes; but if we were living in a state in which people were really divided upon those points, even if there was a big majority one way, we must tolerate those different things. Only a state as completely united as we were on the desirability of people wearing clothes had the right to persecute, as we persecuted those who neglected that formality. (Laughter.) Therefore he said it was absolutely absurd in the modern world to try to interfere with a man like Mr. Shaw by calling him blasphemous.

EDUCATION AND RELIGION.

We had got into a world in which the majority of the governing classes believed in no religion. He had known many editors and newspaper proprietors, but he had yet to meet one who believed in religion. The overwhelming mass of the governing body of the state was un-Christian. That was the first mistake, the mistake of the orthodox side, to suppose that the commonwealth was Christian. It was a heathen country to be conquered and redeemed. The second thing, the thing that people on the other side had to remember, was that this was by no means a new experience for the Christian religion. The Christian religion, especially in those historic and traditional forms as in the Roman Catholic, Greek, and, according to one theory, the Anglican Church, had existed for centuries, had again and again been in power and out of power, been in turn persecuting and persecuted, without any power in the commonwealth and with renewed power in the commonwealth, had gone on, up and down, throughout the ages. They must not believe that they were living in an age in which the Christian religion had been eclipsed, for they were not.

NIETZSCHE OFF HIS HEAD.

We were living in an extraordinary age in which in the main, probably, Christian religion had been revived. Nietzsche, who, although he was entirely off his head—(laughter)—had that peculiar lucidity that belonged to the insane, and saw many things with perfect truth, said that God died in the middle of the 18th century. That was perfectly true, only the Christian God was used to dying and rising from the dead. In France Louis XVI., who happened to be a sincere Catholic, almost pleaded with his Ministers and advisers that he might be excused from appointing an atheist to the archbishopric of Paris. That was where the Christian religion had reached towards the end of the 18th century in France. Since then they had seen in France an enormous revival of Catholic literature and Catholic enthusiasm. In England in the 18th century Dr. Johnson was largely considered a portent, an extraordinary being, because he went to church and had brains. (Laughter.) His friends were always asking him questions with the object of reconciling those two facts. There was no doubt that since Johnson lived and clung to his Christian faith there had arisen great movements, like the Oxford movement. He would emulate Mr. Shaw in his blasphemy, because he thought it was an easy game, and say that if ever God died it was in the middle of the 18th century. It now remained for Mr. Shaw to explain why God had risen from the dead, and why Mr. Shaw had had to use the term God in order to excite a modern audience and to receive a plaintive protest from a poor old herioc atheist at the back of the room objecting that "the unpleasant word God" had been used. Why was the unpleasant word used? Because Christianity had been born again, because nobody as alert, alive and vigorous as Mr. Shaw could do without a God in the modern world. It was as absurd to attack Mr. Shaw for blasphemy as for St. Peter and St. John to attack Tiberius for blasphemy. Mr. Shaw was living in a comparatively Pagan world.

CHRISTIANITY NOT DEAD.

Mr. Shaw commonly associated with Pagans, he was a Pagan himself, and, like many other Pagans, was a very fine man; but the other mistake that had to be guarded against was the conception that because Christianity had

not remained the religion of this particular mass of people or this state, therefore it was dead. Nothing of that sort was at all involved. Christianity was, he thought, the soul of the European peoples. It had been driven out here, there, and in a hundred other places, and it had always returned. He could tell them that same story about the Renaissance as about the 18th century. The Popes, for instance, when Luther made his extremely immoral and mystical remarks, were undoubtedly complete atheists or agnostics. They were not Christian, whatever they were, and yet, if people knew the actual succession of events, they would see that it was true that in an astonishingly short time—about two generations—the old Pagan Pontiffs had entirely altered, and they had saints upon the Papal throne, men as charitable as Francis, as austere as Dominic. This England in which we were living now was a Pagan community, and he had never treated it as anything else, and he did not advise anybody to treat it as anything else; but if anybody supposed that because it had become Pagan it would remain Pagan, he would advise those people to read a little history. Coming next to the study of two or three things about Mr. Shaw's actual philosophy as enunciated in that lecture, Mr. Chesterton continued, Mr. Shaw's philosophy was not blasphemy. Mr. Shaw was, as a matter of fact, a very sincere religious man. He was a man full, almost to excess, as had been many other people who had got into trouble, with religious emotion, and Mr. Shaw was quite right when he said he was a mystic. "I should be inclined to say a muddle-headed mystic," added Mr. Chesterton, amid laughter, "but he is not a blasphemer. I want to get that sort of idea absolutely out of the discussion." A doctor of theology in the Middle Ages, like St. Thomas Aquinas, might possibly have held that a Jew or Mahomedan had points in common with him which permitted of argument, or he might have held that there were no points of agreement; but he never would have been such a fool as to suppose that one could begin arguing with a Pagan unless there were some points of agreement.

MR. SHAW'S PHILOSOPHY NONSENSE.

One could not be blasphemous except against

something one already admitted to be sacred. Therefore, in a state profoundly divided about what is sacred it was absurd to talk about blasphemy. "We must all go ahead and see which wins," exclaimed Mr. Chesterton. Personally I think we shall win." (Applause.) Mr. Shaw's philosophy was not blasphemy; it was nonsense. (Laughter.) He did not use that phrase with any intention of indicating that Mr. Shaw had no intellectual value, but he said that in the strict philosophical sense it was nonsense. The whole of the argument with which Mr. Shaw started out in his lecture was the idea that we must have a God because we must believe in a purpose in the Universe. He (Mr. Chesterton) thoroughly agreed; but he thought that for a freethinker it was a very incautious admission. If we must believe in a God, we must certainly have some kind of interest in that purpose, and therefore suppose that it was a good purpose of some sort, and Mr. Shaw distinctly said it was a good purpose; but he said that although it was a good purpose, it had always been mistaken, foolish, jumbled, and rather less to be trusted than ourselves. All that was playing with words. If he said, "Here are five poor children. They haven't got a mother; let them all come together and manufacture a mother," he thought they would agree that there was a certain slip in the logic of the observation. (Laughter.) That was what literally Mr. Shaw said in his address. He said, "We must come together and make a religion," and then he said, "A God doesn't exist yet, but we must help to make him exist," or words to that effect. All that they would excuse him calling babyish. When they said, "Let's produce a mother," they might indeed be very little children; but even at their infantile and helpless stage he thought they might be able to understand a contradiction in terms, and it was perfectly obvious that the definition of mother was that which produces them.

RIDING A SEWING MACHINE.

If it pleased them to call their eldest child mother, let them do so, but he did not think it would advance human thought very much. (Laughter.) It was perfectly obvious that

when men had talked about a God, they had meant a large number of ideas, but they certainly had not meant something produced by the people who were thinking about it. Mr. Shaw said that heretics were people who found a machine, such as a motor-car, and by tinkering at it turned it into something else. He knew that sounded funny, but it was down in the lecture. (Laughter.) But he would like to say one thing. He did not mind if anybody could find a sewing machine lying about and turn it into an old high bicycle, or if, when they came across a theodolite, they could with a few rapid touches turn it into a motor-car; but he strongly objected to their finding a bicycle and turning it into a sewing machine, and then trying to ride the sewing machine. (Laughter and applause.) The word God had come to be related in men's minds with two or three fundamental ideas, and the most obvious of them was surely this. It was based upon the idea that they could not act without an aim. "Encourage God to be Himself," which was practically what Mr. Shaw said, was nonsense, because they did not know what himself was until they had some theological dogma. And in the same way, if they adopted the line of saying that they would take the machine and alter it into some other shape, they must have some principle and reason for altering it into one shape rather than another. In other words, all actions must have an aim.

A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS.

Unless they remembered that they would become like those asses who went about saying, with a note of exclamation, "Succeed!" They could not succeed in knowing the right thing to do until they were successful. The action, before it was acted, was an ideal—it could not be anything else—therefore when they began to use their moral or mental force towards some object in the universe they must be absolutely certain that that object was right and the thing to be attained. Therefore, at least, there must be something in the universe—an ideal. They must have some theory of the object of human life. There must be first a fixed ideal. What was the good of Mr. Shaw's fixed, or rather unfixed, ideal? What was the good of a God which was gradually trying to

exist? It was a contradiction in terms, but even as a piece of mysticism, what was the good? It was self-evident, of course, that the thing in ordinary words meant nothing at all. Obviously, the moment a thing had begun to struggle it had begun to exist. There was no such thing as trying to exist. They had to exist before they tried. But, apart from the mere logical point, he wanted to point out that there was absolutely no value in that sort of God, because we first wanted something fixed in a God by which we regulated ourselves, and all Mr. Shaw said was that instead of being a jolly atheist he preferred to think there was some deity struggling at the bottom of the universe somewhere who would turn up somewhere and say Mr. Shaw was right in what he said. (Laughter.)

MR. SHAW'S DEMOCRACY.

But that certainly was not anything connected with the idea of God. Mr. Shaw said also that democracy meant the destruction of idols. Of course it was characteristic of Mr. Shaw that he knew no more what democracy meant than he (Mr. Chesterton) knew of the meaning of a long Chinese word in Chinese letters. Democracy meant a very simple thing. Democracy simply meant that if they were snowed up in that room, which for the purposes of the debate he hoped they might be, all of them would have a voice in the decision as to what they should do. If they for example raided the platform and killed him, or if he were allowed to erect a Gatling gun on the table, or any of the other forms of human government—(laughter)—it would be decided by all of them, including himself. Democracy did not mean the destruction of idols at all. He merely mentioned that in order to show the muddle-headedness which he could not help regarding as characteristic of modern opponents of Christianity. In connection with idols, he saw that Mr. Shaw stated that the French revolutionists marched and first cut off the heads of the saints in the cathedrals. They did not. That was historically inaccurate. What they did first was to declare a number of very rigid and, he thought, largely true metaphysical dogmas. They then got into a quarrel with their aristocracy, and a very natural one,

because their aristocracy had sold them to the enemy, and cut off the heads of the idols of flesh and blood.

MR. SHAW'S GOD.

It seemed to him curious that Mr. Shaw had never attempted to define idolatry at all, because it was a very important word. The real definition of idolatry was surely the worshiping of something other than the supreme object of worship, to make the thing which they really regarded as highest in the universe subordinate to some secondary thing that they liked for personal or artistic fancies—say, social preference, or something like that. For instance, to think that being a gentleman was more important than being a citizen was idolatry. Mr. Shaw went on to say that God could not exist unless we made Him: we must make Him of our own ideas. He passed over the intellectual fog in which those ideas seemed to appear, and merely said that that, from a man who attacked idolatry, was the very definition of idolatry, to believe that God would only exist when they had made Him. It was the idea that still existed among the Mohammedans and many of the old races. He thought it was perfectly self-evident on the face of it that such an attitude, to worship only a God they had made themselves was irrational, immoral and irreverent, though he never talked about reverence in a mixed assembly, for he admitted that it was a thing peculiar to those who believed in a definite creed. As far as he could make out, Mr. Shaw wanted them to look into a sort of chaos of the cosmos and see there—of course they would see thousands of things—but he wanted them to see something they would like to call a god and worship it and have done with it. Well, that was what the old Egyptians and Babylonians did, but they left more remains than Mr. Shaw would. (Laughter and applause.)

THE ALTERNATIVE.

In conclusion, he would say a little as to the alternative to Mr. Shaw's theory. Mr. Shaw said a great many things that were profoundly true. He said, for instance, that religion went out in the Middle Ages. That was quite true, and unfortunately Mr. Shaw, among others, had been left in the dregs of sectarianism ever

since. But the point he wanted to emphasise was that Mr. Shaw said, as far as he could make out, that if God did exist He was rather inferior to ourselves; at any rate, he was struggling and doubtful and perpetually frustrated. That, as he had said before, appeared to him to be a mere flowery contradiction in terms, and not worth wondering about. He (Mr. Chesterton) was no theologian, but he would like to put before them in a few words the tradition which had long existed in this civilisation of ours, which was professed by our grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and great-great-grandfathers, but for which the whole system under which they lived, probably the very room in which they talked, and certainly the right of freedom to talk, would never have existed. The historic creed of Christianity, as it existed up to the Reformation, and in a number of cases a long time after, was based upon two fundamental ideas. He was sure that when he told them what those ideas were they would think he was joking, for that was a fate that had followed him all through life. (Laughter.) The two ideas upon which Christian theology was based were the ideas of Reason and Liberty. The first proposition, that Reason was real, was a simple fact, like the statement that two and two made four, apparent to the human mind that had any ability for anything. The second, much more dangerous and difficult, was that Liberty was itself a supreme and sacred thing that they could really admire, and for which they would risk things, even terrible things. Those were the two ideas upon which the old Christian theology was based. In this manner they said God might wish to make the world—if indeed there be a God and a purpose in the Universe—and that (the Universe would be relieved to hear) Mr. Shaw admitted: desiring not so much to control His world as to free it, desiring to make his creatures creators in their turn, responsible for the worlds they created.

SHAW OR BRADLAUGH.

And, according to the old Christian theory, He was standing aside to-day from the evils of this world, not as so far as he could make out Mr. Shaw suggested, because He was unable to interfere with things bigger than Himself, but as a great magnanimous King who said,

"I have sent my son into the fight and he must do His best." He was pointing out to them that that was the old Christian theory. It might have been wrong, and, of course, it was quite arguable. The first idea was that if God set humanity free He could not keep them bound; the second was that the idea of setting the people free was so inspiring a conception that it would excuse man, or God, or any other being, in facing all the risks and troubles of this world. That was the Christian religion. (Applause.) He had always had a vast deal of admiration for the old-fashioned Atheists, and if he had to choose between Mr. Shaw's gospel and that of Charles Bradlaugh, he would pray—with the great disapproval of Charles Bradlaugh—that he might be allowed to be admitted into the camp of Charles Bradlaugh. The old fighting blasphemer who simply denied God brought things nearer to an issue, and he thought the very sadness and stoicism of his many virtues were an indication to many people that he had taken a wrong faith. If anyone asked him (Mr. Chesterton) to prove that there was a God, he could not easily answer such a question upon that platform. But if anyone asked what proof he had that there was any purpose in the Universe, he could only say that it had accumulated upon him all his life like living plants growing round a building. If they did accept it, which would they rather have, the sort of absurd unborn baby, the god of Bernard Shaw, or that other God, Who after all had been the God of their civilisation for many hundreds of years? "If," said Mr. Chesterton, "you believe that there be a person or purpose in the Universe, which would you rather have, this absurd, frustrated baby, kicking in his cradle, or the great King who prefers His knights to be chivalrous and free? If you have to choose between those two explanations of the existence of the Universe, I leave it to you with some confidence which you will choose." (Applause.)

QUESTIONS.

At the conclusion of the address, Mr. CORNFORD requested the audience to lash Mr. Chesterton into fury, as he had begged.

After Mr. Chesterton had replied to a query regarding the compatibility of Democracy with

Monarchy, and reproving a gentleman who worshipped Osiris and other gods, a questioner asked if Mr. Shaw said anything about the worship of the god he spoke of.

Mr. CHESTERTON said that was one thing he meant to have touched upon. He thought the sort of frustrated purpose in the Universe that Mr. Shaw portrayed could not possibly be an object of worship in the Christian sense, but would rather be an object of pity.

PASCAL AND THE JESUITS.

A questioner said Mr. Chesterton held that the Christian theology was founded on Reason and Liberty, and he said also that religion died in the 18th century. Did he suggest that it lived when Pascal was suppressed by the Catholic Church?

Mr. CHESTERTON said it was quite true that Pascal denied that Reason could lead one to God and that Liberty was possible. It was because the Catholic Church was on the side of Reason and Liberty that it suppressed Pascal and the Jansenists. Did anyone in the room know what Pascal was arguing with the Jesuits about? Well, he would tell them. The Jesuits said that God really wanted every man to be good, to escape hell and to save his soul. Pascal said that God deliberately damned some people, that he deliberately meant that some people should not have the grace to enable them to overcome their temptations? On which side were his hearers? On which side was the whole civilised world? When Mr. R. J. Campbell said, "It is deeds not creeds that save us," the Pope was walking on the top of Luther. When the ordinary modern Socialist said that every man must be given a chance and that it was a man's own merits that would save him, the Pope was walking on the top of Calvin. Pascal was a far greater and a better man than his opponents; but they were right, and he was wrong.

A PLEA FOR MR. SHAW.

Mr. VULLIAMY asked if Mr. Chesterton did not think he had taken Mr. Shaw rather too literally. He did not want to pose as Mr. Shaw's defender, but it certainly seemed to him that Mr. Chesterton was making rather a caricature of Mr. Shaw. When speaking of God, Mr. Shaw

had to speak in human terms to a human audience.

Mr. CHESTERTON replied that he did not think he had been guilty of any unfairness to Mr. Shaw. He had known Mr. Shaw for a great many years, and perhaps that was why he was apt to misunderstand him. He simply said that he did not think the idea of a God merely evolving with the Universe would satisfy the desires of humanity. If there were such a half-imprisoned Purpose in the Universe, he could not worship it, because he would consider his own opinions just as good.

The questioner then asked if Mr. Shaw did not mean that a Purpose originated the Universe, that man could make standards of right and wrong, that he was rebuked by his failures and rewarded by his successes?

Mr. CHESTERTON said in the course of his reply that Mr. Shaw said we had got to help God to exist. He (Mr. Chesterton) would certainly desire to see God exist before he judged Him and even before he created Him.

ANIMALS AND LIBERTY.

Mr. Chesterton was asked if he extended his doctrine of Liberty to animals, and if so, where he drew the line between animals and the vegetable kingdom.

Mr. CHESTERTON said he drew a very strong line between man and animals, although he admitted that there was an infinite development of various higher qualities in some animals. He would say that the man who talked about its being difficult to draw a line was just a little mad. He would say that the man who talked about the horse and dog, to take the highest animals, possessing a soul and a conscience was just a little mad.

AN AMUSING ARGUMENT:

A passage-at-arms between Mr. Chesterton and a questioner caused a good deal of amusement. The questioner suggested that Mr. Chesterton could not say he knew a thing unless he had scientific proof of it. He (the questioner) would not say "I know," but "I have an intuition."

Mr. CHESTERTON : You know you exist?

The questioner : No; I should be very careful to avoid the word "know." I should say, "I have an intuition that I exist."

MR. CHESTERTON: Then so much the worse for you. I know, I am absolutely certain, that I exist, and I should say that that gentleman is quite certain that he exists, and that he is incorrect in saying that he could not be certain of anything of which he had not absolute scientific proof.

The questioner: It is merely a matter of definition. I use the word in a different sense. I say it is perfectly true that I have an intuition that I exist.

MR. CHESTERTON: Cherish it. (Laughter and applause.)

To an inquirer on the subject of Hell, with regard to which Christianity is supposed to possess some definite doctrine, MR. CHESTERTON said that as he could not speak from personal experience, he regarded it as a thing to be avoided.

MR. CHESTERTON'S POSITION.

MR. LOWES DICKINSON asked how Mr. Chesterton decided the practice of Christianity.

MR. CHESTERTON said, as far as his personal opinions were concerned, he was more than ever inclined to think, though he had not yet been admitted, that possibly the claims of the Greek and Anglican Churches were less near the truth than the Roman Catholic Church. He did not use the words Reason and Liberty in the sense that they were anything separate to the Roman Catholic Church from the Anglican or Greek Church or any other. The first argument was that God could not set man free and at the same time keep him bound, and the second that it was a fine thing that God set men free. Those certainly were the bases of Christian theology throughout all the ages, and he thought he was quite justified in calling them Christian philosophy.

MR. LOWES DICKINSON further asked if Mr. Chesterton, when he said that Reason and Liberty were the essence of Christianity, believed that nothing else was essential. Was it essential to believe in the apple and the damnation of man and the redemption through Jesus Christ?

MR. CHESTERTON said he was sure that he never said that the practice of Christianity was like the practice of all other religions in supporting the doctrines of that particular reli-

gion. He simply said that the Christian religion was founded upon the doctrines of Reason and Liberty. The doctrine of Liberty was that the Creator made something which could also create in its turn. That was ordinary logic. If they said that God could at the same time keep men bound and prevent their going wrong they were mystic, they were confusing terms, and were not using Reason. If they admitted that Liberty was desirable and that Reason constrained things, then they had the Christian doctrine of Free Will.

BELIEF IN MIRACLES.

"How do you reconcile that position with a belief in miracles?" was the next question.

MR. CHESTERTON: I have always believed in miracles, even before I believed in Christianity. I have never been able to see why spirit should not alter matter, and I have never been able to see the philosophic objection to miracles.

ROMAN CHURCH AND LIBERTY.

Amongst other questions which followed was one relating to the expulsion of Father Tyrrell from the Roman Catholic Church. MR. CHESTERTON said that he was a member of the National Liberal Club, but if he continued to make speeches which were inconsistent with Liberal principles he could have no objection in the abstract if he were requested to resign his membership. He added: "I can assure you, and I would prove it to you if I had time, that the Popes have done a hundred times more for Liberty than any of the Protestant Churches ever have.

THE RELIGION OF BRADLAUGH.

MR. BONNER asked if Mr. Chesterton said that Charles Bradlaugh denied God.

MR. CHESTERTON said he believed there was a sort of Greek joke in connection with that, but he thought he was up to it. (Laughter.) He believed that Bradlaugh always maintained that he did not deny God, but that he only denied that the Person believed in at the moment was God. Bradlaugh said that his "a" before the "theist" did not mean that there was no God, but that he was a matter-of-fact person going about without a theos. He was not a Greek scholar, and as there were no doubt hundreds, nay, millions, of people in that room who were accomplished Greek scholars, he

would leave it to them. (Laughter and applause.)

NO ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE.

Mr. BRIMLEY JOHNSON thought there was no essential difference between what Mr. Shaw called making God and what Mr. Chesterton called defining or trying to explain God. Both admitted the existence of something which they, at all events in a historical sense, called God, and both were entirely concerned in the effort which they temporarily were making to adapt this idea of God to the present day.

THE TWO CONCEPTIONS.

Mr. CHESTERTON said he regarded that as an answer to Mr. Shaw and not to him, for he had said nothing about the necessity for the existence of a God before you could imagine Him. One little point he wanted to bring out before they all disappeared, although he never seemed able to disappear entirely, somehow. (Laughter.) There was one little difference between taking the existence of God as a thing real and eternal and between taking God as something not yet real and setting people as a sort of moulding force in the world. If they took a religion that told them the first, then oppressing the poor or running away with their neighbour's wife and little things of that sort to which people in fashionable society seemed to be so easily tempted, reminded them that there was a religion in front of them which told them quite plainly that oppressing the poor was one of the sins crying to Heaven for vengeance. If they took the other kind of religion, they were apt to be a little inclined to think that God was only partly made, and it might turn out that oppressing the poor and social reconstruction—(laughter)—and things of that kind were part of the working out of the scheme. Frankly, he took his stand with the old morality, with the old religion. He had rather have justice said and done and some things laid down that we could not do than leave the condition of the poor and the jurisdiction of this world in the hands of the infinitely delicate modulations of the psychology of the Fabians. (Applause.)

Here the CHAIRMAN rose to call attention to the lateness of the hour, and proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the speaker, to which the

audience responded by prolonged applause and cheering. Cambridge has to thank Mr. Chesterton for a unique and most enjoyable evening.

*From the "Christian Commonwealth,"
November 29th, 1911.*

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION.

Mr. Chesterton Replies to Mr. Shaw.

A large audience assembled in the Guildhall, Cambridge, on Friday, November 17th, to hear Mr. G. K. Chesterton's reply to the address (reported in the "Christian Commonwealth") by Mr. Bernard Shaw on "The Future of Religion," recently delivered to the Heretics. This audacious Society was addressed earlier in the year by the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and Mr. Chesterton, like Mr. Campbell, was invited to represent Christianity, though from a somewhat different point of view, for it is well known that Mr. Chesterton is probably soon to be admitted into the Roman Catholic Church.

Mr. Chesterton objected to the attitude which regarded Mr. Shaw as a blasphemer, for, as he pointed out, England is at present a pagan country, to be conquered by Christianity, and blasphemy implies an accepted religion wherent the blasphemer may blaspheme. All that could be said was that Mr. Shaw's philosophy was nonsense—with its struggling life-force of a God that no one could reverence or worship. Such a God was rather an object of pity, and Mr. Chesterton declared himself for that permanent ideal of Christian tradition, the God of Revelation. During the interesting discussion which followed, Mr. Chesterton, in reply to a question as to the attitude of the Catholic Church in suppressing Pascal and the Jansenists, declared that whenever Mr. R. J. Campbell and others said, "It is deeds, not creeds, that save us," the Pope was walking on the top of Luther.

This somewhat enigmatic remark was typical of many others which must be puzzling to the Liberal-Christian of to-day who is unable to accept Mr. Chesterton's position. When, for instance, Mr. Chesterton was asked, in view of his acceptance of the Catholic dogma, what he thought on the subject of hell, he replied that he had never been there himself, nor did he know anyone who had been there, but he under-

stood it was a thing to be avoided. Such an answer with regard to a question on which traditional Christianity has held very definite views—views which have caused many to secede from the Churches—hardly meets the difficulties of those who are looking for light in these matters.

However, Mr. Chesterton, like Mr. Shaw, was at his best—the very incarnation of G. K. C.; and what more could one ask?

*From "The Cambridge Review,"
November 23rd, 1911.*

THE HERETICS.

A remarkable meeting was held on Friday, November 17th, when the Heretics had invited Mr. G. K. Chesterton to champion Orthodoxy against the recent address of Mr. Bernard Shaw before the Society. When Mr. Chesterton arrived, an audience numbering between eight and nine hundred had occupied almost every available seat in the Guildhall, and after a brief introduction by Mr. Cornford the speaker proceeded to explain why he considered Mr. Shaw's philosophy not so much blasphemous as nonsensical. England, he insisted, is not a Christian country. The majority of the governing classes believed in no religion, nor had he ever known a newspaper editor or proprietor who was a Christian. What sense could there be of speaking of blasphemy in a pagan country which had yet to be won for Christianity? This was the mistake of Orthodoxy—Mr. Shaw's mistake consisted of assuming that Christianity was dead, and that mankind could set about the elaboration of a new religion. We might as well talk about making a mother as making the God of Mr. Shaw. Mr. Chesterton's own position was practically that of the Church of Rome, but as regards God he preferred the view of Bradlaugh to that of Mr. Shaw! Mr. Chesterton's address lasted an hour, and was followed by a long and animated discussion, during which Mr. Chesterton was seen to great advantage; his resource and humour in debate would be hard to equal.

We congratulated the Society on the occasion of Mr. Shaw's visit, and we do so again: Shaw—Chesterton—one name only can render the matter complete.

From "The Gownsmen," November 25th, 1911.

G. K. CHESTERTON—AN IMPRESSION.

The attention devoted to the blasphemies of G. B. S. by the Editor of "The Academy," Mr. Alfred Noyes, and other would-be champions of Orthodoxy, have evidently not been without effect—to judge by the large and distinguished audience which flocked to hear Mr. Chesterton's demolition of the Life Force on Friday night. There must have been close upon a thousand present when Mr. Chesterton was first described.

As was fitting, the chair was occupied by Mr. Cornford, who presided at Mr. Shaw's meeting, and whose recently published indictment of the Chapel system is fresh in our minds; and it was made clear that the Heretics, as a society, were not responsible for the opinions of their hon. member, Mr. Shaw, and still less were they guilty of extending their approval to those of so firm a traditionalist as Mr. Chesterton. It is to be hoped, however, that the orthodox portion of the audience were gratified by Mr. Chesterton's initial insistence on denying the honour of blasphemy to Mr. Shaw's remarks. England, said he, is not a Christian country; how therefore can Englishmen blaspheme? (Applause.) The argument was irresistible—here we may discern the true difference between Cambridge and Oxford.

Passing to the second portion of the address, it does not seem to us that Mr. Chesterton fully appreciated the position of Mr. Shaw, and those who, with him, adopt the vitalistic hypothesis (whether the *élan vital* of Bergson, or the Life Force of Mr. Shaw). It may be conceded to Mr. Chesterton that the conjunction of ethical values with this Force is questionable Metaphysic, but the objection that we cannot speak of forwarding its purpose, or, as Mr. Shaw put, of "making God," without adopting the doubtful view that a ready-made religion or Theism can be mechanically evolved ("Go to now, let us make a mother") appears to us to rest on a misunderstanding. In fact, the existence of such a misunderstanding was clear from Mr. Chesterton's inference that Mr. Shaw's use of the word God implied a recrudescence of Christianity. Surely the true inference is that apparently suggested by the distinguished anthropologist who elicited Mr. Shaw's reasons

for the use of this word God on the occasion of his speech—an inference, in short, merely to the unhappiness of Mr. Shaw's terminology.

Had Mr. Shaw contented himself with his Life Force and dispensed with the appellation God, with its emotional associations for Mr. Chesterton, the latter would not necessarily have been led astray. We hold no brief for Mr. Shaw, but in justice this point at least should be urged. Mr. Chesterton's own position, that of an Anglo-Catholic, with Romanist potentialities, does not appear to call for further comment.

A surprisingly successful and lengthy debate followed this vigorously reverent Apologetic. Seldom can a discussion in the Guildhall have continued unabated for over an hour. Whether replying to worshippers of Osiris, to grandsons of Bradlaugh, to Physicists, to Medicine Men, or to Mr. Lowes Dickinson (the only Heretic, by the way, dealt with in Mr. Chesterton's "Heretics"), Mr. Chesterton's acumen was inexpugnable. From whatever side he was attacked, it was impossible to get round him, impossible to impinge on the *esprit de corps* of this phalanx of orthodoxy.

It was a rare pleasure to observe the agility with which he pounced upon the gist or motive of a question, his scrupulous fairness, his exacerbating aplomb. Deplore as we may the dissipation of endowments of such breadth and profundity in acceptance of the Miraculous, and the palliation of Papal Oppression, we must be grateful indeed to a speaker who can occasionally introduce Humour into the Divine. Perhaps the sinister influence of Mr. Belloc is to blame for the present mission of Mr. Chesterton out of his element—to bolster up a sinking ship.

For we have an Intuition that few representatives of the Creeds can be so sympathetic to the aims and ideals of the heresy as this apostle of Toleration and Goodwill—and we hope he will allow us to "cherish it." Mr. Chesterton's meeting was a personal triumph, and Cambridge gave him a worthy welcome. Rumour says that the Heretic community has since gained numerous adherents.

We are not entirely without hopes of Mr. Chesterton.

C. K. O.

